The Girl Who Ruled Fairyland — For a Little While

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In which a young girl named Mallow leaves the country for the city, meets a number of Winds, Cats, and handsome folk, sees something dreadful, and engages, much against her will, in Politicks of the most muddled kind.

History is a funny little creature. Do you remember visiting your old Aunt that autumn when the trees shone so very yellow, and how she owned a striped and unsocial cat, quite old and fat and wounded about the ears and whiskers, with a crooked, broken tail? That cat would not come to you no matter how you coaxed and called; it had its own business, thank you, and no time for you. But as the evening wore on, it would come and show some affection or favor to your Aunt, or your Father, or the old end-table with the stack of green coasters on it. You couldn't predict who that cat might decide to love, or who it might decide to bite. You couldn't tell what it thought or felt, or how old it might really be, or whether it would one day, miraculously, decide to let you put one hand, very briefly, on its dusty head.

History is like that.

Of course, unlike your Aunt's cat, history is going on all around you, all the time, and is often quite lively. Sometimes it rests in a sunbeam for a peaceful century or two, but on the whole, history is always plotting, and it bites very hard. It stalks around the world, fickle and dissatisfied and often angry. It demands to be fed just a little earlier each day, until you find yourself carving meat from the bone as fast as you can, faster than you thought possible, just to satisfy it. Some people have a kind of marvelous talent for calming it and enticing it onto their laps. To some it will never even spare a glance.

No matter where one begins telling a story, a very long road stretches out before and behind, full of wild and lovely creatures performing feats and acts of daring. No matter how much a narrator might want to, she cannot pack all of them into one tale. That's the trouble—history goes on all around the story at hand, it is what made it happen and what will happen after, all of those extraordinary events and folk and dangers and near-misses, choices that had to be made so that everything after could happen as it did. A single story is but one square of blueberries growing in one plot, on one farm, on the fertile face of the whole world. A heroine steps in, and sees a wickedness in need of solving—but she is never the first, or the last. She plays her part, blessedly and necessarily innocent of that fat old cat sneaking around the borders of her tale, licking its paws while she bleeds and fights, whipping its tail at her trials and yawning at her triumphs. The cat does not care. It has seen all this before and will see it again.

In short, Fairyland has always needed saving.

This is a story about another girl, and another time, and another terrible thing that wanted very much to happen in Fairyland. You may have heard of her, for that striped old monster called history sat very happily in her lap and let her feed it milk.

Her name was Mallow.

Once upon a time, a girl named Mallow grew very tired indeed of her little country house, where she grew the same enormous luckfigs and love-plantains every summer, slept on the same talking bed, and studied the same tame and amiable magic. Her friends would visit her from time to time, for she lived on the shores of a whiskey lake where trifle-trees hung heavy with raisin and soursop tarts, but they had their own quite thrilling lives, and Mallow did not insist that they stay just to make her happy. She was not that sort of girl, and prided herself on it. One of her dearest and handsomest friends was a sorcerer, and from him she had learned so much magic even her hairpins got up and started living serious-minded lives, writing hairpin-ballads, celebrating hairpin-holidays, and inventing several new schools of philosophy. But still Mallow was discontent, for all the magic she knew was Dry Magic, and she longed for more.

Now, magic, like people, turns out quite differently depending on how it was brought up. Long ago a quorum of the sort of folk who knew about such things (almost all young, excitable, and prone to declaring things at high volumes) decided that mere Light and Dark Magics were insufficient to Fairyland's needs, and rather boring to boot. Soon after the mystical scene exploded with new notions: Dry Magic and Wet Magic, Hot Magic and Cold Magic, Fat Magic and Thin Magic, Loud Magic and Shy Magic, Bitter Magic and Sour Magic, Sympathetic Magic and Severe Magic, even Umbrella Magic and Fan Magic. Fairyland knows more sorts of magic than I could ever tell you about, even if you and I had all the time and tea we could wish for.

But Mallow's sorcerer friend had been a Dry Magician, and though Mallow did not really think of herself as a magician yet—more of a freelance wizard or part-time hag—she belonged to the Dry School as well. Dry Magic, having been invented by a middle-aged museum curator on her night shift, consorts with inanimate objects, books and maps and lamps and doors and hairpins. The Sands of Time also figure in the higher levels, as well as the Dust of Ages and Thirsts of all kinds. It is a difficult discipline, and Mallow had mastered it. Yet still she yearned to know Wet Magic too, which had to do with living things, with tears and rain and love and blood. Truly, Mallow yearned to know everything. Curiosity was part of her, like her short blond hair and bitten fingernails. The best thing in the world was not her luckfigs or her whiskey lake, not her weeping-orchid garden or the cast-iron ducks that thudded heavily on her windowsills every morning, hoping for a bit of onion oil to moisten their bills, not even her friends or her little country house, but having curiosity satisfied, feeling the warm, sure spread of knowledge through her body.

If this is so, you might well ask, why do you stay in your cozy house, Mallow, and not venture out into the wilder bits of Fairyland looking for things to know? Are you fearful? Are you ill?

If I am to tell you the truth and I think that I must, if I am to do my job well, Mallow was not like the other creatures in Fairyland. She had used her magic to make a pleasant life for herself, where she could be alone as she preferred, and where nothing would disturb or hurt her if she did not want to be disturbed or hurt. This was important to her, for she wished to be safe, and she wished to live in a kind world, which on the best of days Fairyland could only manage for an hour or two before getting bored and playing a trick on a maiden or nine.

I will tell you what her ducks would say on the subject, for Mallow herself would, with a bright smile, tell you to mind your business and send you on your way with a warm soursop pudding. Her ducks, after all, knew her quite as well as anyone, and since she gathered their coal eggs for breakfast every morning (do not worry! once cracked open the little black things overflow with smoky, rich yolk the color of ink) they felt she was in some sense their rooster and therefore family.

All three of the cast-iron ducks would tell you quackingly: “Mallow is the cleverest girl since the first girl, so she knows the magic of Keeping to Yourself. When she first built her little house—we saw it! With her own hands! And only a few of the windows were mysticked up out of candy or wishes—the villagers couldn’t leave her alone. That’s Winesap village, just down the road, population two hundred Fairies, one hundred Ouphes, fifty Tanuki, several Gnomes, and at least one Jack-in-the-Green. Practically all of them showed up at her door with Fairy food and gold, looking helpful and honest as best they could. Where did she come from? What did she do for a profession? Why had she chosen Winesap? Did she find any of the Fairy youths attractive in a marrying way? What sort of magic could she do and would she do it right now for all to see? Would she represent her Folk in the Seelie come harvest time?”

Mallow’s bed would then ruffle its linens, plump its pillows into a mouth, and join in to explain the situation: “We beds know quite well that in addition to all the other kinds of magic there is Yes Magic and No Magic, and Mallow is wonderful fierce at No Magic. Sometimes that is the last magic you can hold on to, when all the rest has gone. No, she said to all of it. ‘I want to live a little life in a little house by a little lake. I do not want to be bothered by anyone. I do not want to marry a Fairy boy. I do not want to ply my trade at the market. I do not want to pass laws at the Seelie which will vanish up in green smoke by dawn when everyone does as they like anyway. I do not want to muddle about with Politicks, and whenever two Folk of any sort are in a room together there are always Politicks to be muddled in. I have all the books I could need, and what more could I need than books? I shall only engage in commerce if books are the coin. Come to my door if you have a book—and a good one, not just your great-aunt’s book of doily patterns—and I will give you an egg or a cake or a pair of woolen socks. I am a practical girl, and a life is only so long. It should be spent in as much peace and good eating and good reading as possible and no undue excitement. That is all I am after.’ Poor thing has had troubles in her youth. She only wanted a gentle, slow sort of living from then till forever.”

Mallow’s hairpins would clack together into a little wiry homunculus and finish up: “No one in Fairyland had ever met a practical girl before, who looked to the future and expected winter to come. They were deathly curious, but hermits are greatly respected. A village counts itself blessed to

have one, and Mallow had done just as well as announcing she meant to be a country witch in commune with the cosmos. Every so often a book would appear on her doorstep—good ones, such as Cabbage's *Index of Wunnerous Machines and Their Moods* andButtonwood's *A Redcap's Carol* and even Arthur Amblygonite's *Advanced Manual of Questing Physicks for Experts Only*—and she would leave that cake or those woolen socks or a bit of home-cut soap, and all of these economies happened in quiet before the sun came up and everyone counted it well done. Before long, the villagers had decided that 'practical' meant 'extremely magical and full of interesting objects' and had officially subtitled themselves, Winesap: A Pracktical Towne."

But ducks must always have the last word, and they are very much heavier than hairpins. "It all went along nicely for a good while, and you would almost think Mallow the usual sort of hermit, save that once, when her sorcerer friend visited, we saw her crying in his arms, and him patting her hair, as though she had been hurt a long time ago and reminded of it all unwanted. It's true the world will always hurt you, we say, so best to stay with your ducks by a pleasant lake, and feed them the sparks of your dinner-fire, the fat ones with orange bits especially."

And Mallow might have, for all her days, but for Temptation. Temptation likes best those who think they have a natural immunity, for it may laugh all the harder when they succumb. Temptation arrived at Mallow's house one soft-edged morning when the peaty fog on her lake hung thickest, in the form of a broadsheet plastered by an innocent wind against her strong black door. Golden ink swirled into beautiful calligraphy; bold red and black words leapt up at her hungry eyes.

King Goldmouth (the Mad) Byds a Happy Cherrycost to Alle
And Issues The Followyng Compulsion to His Fairylanders:
Present Theeself to Pandemonium Upon Applemas
For the Commencement of the Most Excellent
Fairyland World ' s Foul!
Feasting, Fighting, Frolyck!
Exhibitions of the Many Counties of Fairyland!

Demonstrations of Every Kind of Magic and Machine!
See, Savor, Seize!
Festivities to Culminate
In the First Tithe in a Thousand Years.
ATTENDANCE MANDATORY.
Merchant Boothes Still Available!

Mallow looked out at the caramel-colored whiskey lake, and the grey-green islands floating off in the reaches of it, the first plum-tailed buffleheads hiding in those ferny trees, honking up the dawn. The fog thinned as if to say: *I will protect you here no more*. The practical country witch of Winesap looked down at her mournful cast-iron ducks, who could read very well, even backward through the thin vellum sheet, as Mallow did not believe in letting any creature, no matter how strange or small, live in ignorance.

“They are sure to have a showing of Wet Magic there, and perhaps Shy Magic, too, and even Fat Magic,” she said softly, a thrill in her voice. “And besides, the story had to start sooner or later. I had only hoped it would be a little later, and I could rest for another spring in my library. I believe I was just starting to get the hang of Questing Physicks. But there’s no practice like real living, and anyway it’s mandatory. What do you suppose a Tithe is? It sounds marvelous.”

But neither her bed nor her hairpins nor her ducks had an answer for dear Mallow, for the Tithe had not been seen or heard of in Fairyland since long before their making. At that very moment, even Winesap’s friar was busy looking it up in his oldest book, and finding only a reference to another, more ancient volume, which he had long since traded away for a round of cheese and some very dubious mushrooms.

Thus, when she appeared on the carriage platform at Winesap Station, the many bright-winged Fairies, glowering Ouphes, stripe-tailed Tanuki and violet-capped Gnomes gathered there saw a near-total stranger. Seventeen and taller than she knew what to do with, she wore a boy’s practical clothes, black breeches and grey tights, a cream vest over coffee-colored shirt (she had spoiled herself with a bit of lace at the cuffs, for she enjoyed tatting),

and no wings or horns or Sunday hat at all. Instead, she kept her hair bobbed short about her chin, as it was an indistinct, noncommittal sort of blond that would do itself no favors by flowing long or wild. Her sword, which was in fact a very long, very serious-looking silver sewing needle, hung at her side, a pack of supplies (mostly books) hung from her strong shoulder, and a cast-iron duck clunked along behind her, trying determinedly to be taken along. Mallow turned and shook her finger at the dark-billed little beast, who looked appropriately ashamed.

“You and your mother must stay and look after the bed,” she said firmly. “Or it will be lonely. You may sleep on it, but only at night, and when it wants to recite its poetry, you must look as if you think it’s very good. Do you promise?”

The duck quacked miserably as she turned it firmly round and pushed it toward home.

A Fairy lady with glossy plum-colored hair and buttercream wings shifted her luggage and whispered something to her bespectacled, behoofed friend, who puffed at a tamarind pipe and nodded agreement. Mallow felt very *seen*, in a way she did not quite like. The spring sun glittered through the many wings belonging to the suddenly silent Fairies, spread out and unfurled to catch the warmth and the light. A little Fairy boy, his hair a wild mass of sticky, pomegranate-colored curls, ran fearlessly to her.

“Hullo! Are you the hermit?” he asked excitedly. “Will you sign my schoolbook? Or! Oh! Would you like my schoolbook? It’s not *very* good, but it has long words, and gloss’ry, and a fellow on the front, see?”

The boy held up a large volume with a stern-looking Nålegoblin embossed onto the cover, admonishing, with one long knitting needle, every child to pay attention and not pull faces. Around the Nålegoblin’s huge bullfrog head the title danced: *Carolingus Crumblecap’s Guide to Being a Small, Helpless, and Probably Too Clever By Half Fairy (Abridged).*

“I’ll take socks!” chirped the magenta-haired child, eager to make a deal. “Or a pipe, or a muffin but only if it hasn’t got any nuts in it. No soap, please.”

Mallow smiled and though she knew children ought not to sell their textbooks, she wagered he would get top marks if he made a mean bargain and she hadn't the faintest idea what Fairy educations were made of. She had tutored a bee-nymph or two in her day, but Fairies only taught their own. She rummaged in her pack and drew out a pair of good, sturdy mittens, which she handed over to the wide-eyed boy. He took them reverently and gave the book up without a glance before shoving the mittens onto the tips of his little wings and jogging back to his mother and a group of young Fairy girls and boys that had gathered to see if he'd pull it off. They welcomed him with impressed sighing and much crooning over the woolen prize.

Nevertheless, when the family carriages began to approach, no one kept an empty seat for Mallow, least of all the small, helpless, and too clever by half Fairy or his mother, who crammed his friends in until they hung out the window, waving their little woad-painted arms at her. One by one the stagecoaches pulled into Winesap Station and one by one they departed, drawn by alligators, llamas, bulls, even a pair of toads with bright pink markings around their eyes. The World's Foul would begin in a fortnight, and King Goldmouth had given them all so little time. The toads raced off, sending up a spray of mud.

Finally, Mallow alone remained on the carriage platform, and the evening had begun to set the sky for her supper. Idly, she opened Carolingus Crumblecap's primer and rifled through the pages. *On Curdling Cream*, one chapter announced. *On Spoiling Beer*, said another. *On Acquiring Humans*, *On Shoe Magic*, *On Leaving Unseelies Alone*. Her ink-stained and page-chapped finger rested in the crease of: *On Being Last Man Out*.

"Happens to everyone," Carolingus grumbled, his bullfrog face looming large and wriggling with life from the page, his spectacles a pair of perfectly round cat's eyes, their slitted pupils glaring at the imagined student. "Best to think of it as being First Man In, and thump the next poor fellow who comes along for his tardiness. A Fairy must make her own way in the world, for the world will never make way for her. That, incidentally, is the First Theorem of Questing Physicks, which you'll learn all about when you're older and don't care anymore."

Over the Nålegoblin's raspy voice, Mallow could hear a carriage approaching. It clopped up to the station—a black iron horse whose belly swelled very wide and large indeed and had tall, red-curtained windows where its ribs ought to have been. Its head curved with terrible grace and nobility, its mane curling like fireplace pokers, its nose aflame with embers. Mallow cried out in delight, for she did so love iron creatures, and reached out to pat its decidedly un-velvet nose.

"That'll be mine, Miss," came a soft, lilting voice, and Mallow saw that she was not alone on the platform at all, but a slim young gentleman leaned up against a cheerful lamppost a little ways away. He had not been there before, she felt certain, he simply had *not*. He wore a neat, trimmed and pointed beard the color of lamplight, had wicked silvery eyes, and a dashing black velvet coat, the color of the horse and the lamppost and her ducks. Int he center of his flame-blue cravat, a lamplighter's key pinned the silk in place.

"Mabry Muscat," he said finally, by way of introducing himself. "Your servant."

"Oh, I doubt it," said Mallow, but not unkindly. One cannot live in Fairyland too long, even closed up in a country house with hairpins for company, before discovering that Fairies like little better than to leap headfirst into dramas of the first order, to make trouble if they've a mind, love if they can, and mischief at any cost. "But my name is Mallow."

"Listen to all those Ms!" Mabry marveled softly, and began to sing very gently: "Oh, Mallow Met a Marvelous Man, by the name of Mabry Muscat…"

"Listen," Mallow interrupted. "I haven't any interest in following you to a stash of gold in the hills or dancing at a Fairy ball or answering riddles or meeting any eligible Fairy dukes who have a castle just on the other side of a curtain of mist—no. I am a magician—mostly—and I am on my way to the Foul like everyone else. Don't try to charm me, please. I am a practical girl."

"Those are my favorite kind," grinned Mabry Muscat. He changed the subject as though she had said nothing at all. "Do you admire my horse, Mallow?" Mabry said without moving.

“I do!” Mallow said, louder and happier than she meant to, her delight in new things bubbling out.

“Well, my young witchly friend, come and ride with me. You will find no better, for this is the Carriageless Horse, Belinda Cabbage’s newest invention, which I am testing for her, and delivering to the Foul at earliest convenience. I promise to feed you regularly upon the way, not bother you with questions of personal history or future marriage, and refrain from making too many puns. But I cannot promise not to charm. I am quite helpless in the face of my own winning nature.”

Mabry Muscat removed himself from the lamppost with an easy, nimble hop, and as he did his velvet suit shifted to the cobblestone greys and whites of the platform, to the brown and green of the trees, and finally to the black and red of the Carriageless Horse as he opened a door for her in the beast’s vast belly and gave, very briefly, a half-smile and a half-bow. Mallow saw no wings at his shoulders (though that certainly did not mean he had none) and wondered if this was the “at least one” Jack-in-the-Green of the Winesap census. It was, however, never polite to inquire after a creature’s nature. If he wanted you to know, he’d have made it apparent. Anyway, Jack-in-the-Greens were tricky folk—they had a wallop of a talent for hiding and a passion for stealing.

Mallow knew better than to get into a strange carriage with a strange man who might or might not love thievery better than his own mother, but no other seemed forthcoming, and attendance was, after all, mandatory. She felt that if she had to, she could thump this skinny fellow solidly, get out, and walk the rest of the way if the whole business became entirely *too* winning.

The interior of the Horse glowed with the light of a little red lantern; the walls shone cream and damask, the seats a plush scarlet. It was all anyone could want of a carriage, save that they rode inside the body of another creature, which unsettled Mallow. A slender horn curlicuing down from the roof allowed Mabry to tell the beast to be off. He called it Peppercorn, and it harrumphed gruffly back that they would rest for dinner in two hours, and to please not bother it, as it had to concentrate.

“Shall we play Bezique? Or Nightjack? I’ve cards, or chess if you prefer, but I’ve always found chess to be a bit too much like real life to provide much enjoyment as a game.”

Mallow did not play cards, as that often led to losing things, since Fairies cheated as a matter of honor. *It’s not a game if you don’t cheat*, Carolingus Crumblecap would have told her, had she opened the book to *On Taking Tricks*. *It’s just two sods making a mess with fifty-two pieces of paper.* But Mallow did not open her newest literary acquisition. “How long have you lived in Winesap?” she countered instead.

“Oh, off and on, off and on, for nearly just about forever,” answered Mabry in a dreamy tone. “Since my love vanished, at least, and before that, too, I think, though it gets jumbled the further back one goes. When you’ve lost your girl, it doesn’t much matter where you live. Everywhere is just The Place She Isn’t, and that’s the front and back of it.”

Mallow looked out the window into the rolling golden valley, the winerows and the red sundown. Not a Fairy living didn’t have a tale of love lost or found. They traded them like money. Mallow had always found love to be like a spindle or bobbin she could take up for a time—when her sorcerer friend visited, for example. But she could always put it down when she liked, and be quite all right until the time came to dust it off again. The endless reeling affairs of Fairies exhausted her. But all the many social circles of Fairyland held in agreement that if one brings up the subject of one’s love, the other party is obligated to ask after it and listen to whatever ballad might follow. To do otherwise would be just terrible manners.

“Tell me about your love,” Mallow sighed, observing form.

Mabry Muscat looked at her out of the corner of his eye. “Oh, it’s a long and exciting story, sure to charm and make you swoon over me. Let’s call custom satisfied and skip the tale, shall we?”

Mallow’s attention sharpened to a point. “It must be a very good story if you don’t want to tell it. Everyone wants to tell theirs. When I first set up my house I could hardly keep Myfanwy Redbean from reciting the tale of the

boy she loved for seven years before some kirtle-tying trollop named Janet stole him away. In alliterative verse. With a tambourine."

"It is the very best of stories. She left me for a cat and a cloud, ring down the bluebells-o. She left me for a storm and a coat of green. Down fall the lilies-o." His voice was so sad and gentle that Mallow felt tears coming to her eyes all unbidden.

"But that was a hundred years ago if it was a minute past." Mabry shook himself like a wet bird and came up as bright and beguiling as before. "And what matters it if a girl runs off, or gets done in by pirates, or gets a better job than her lesser half? Let us speak of something less common and more thrilling. What news have you of the World's Foul? The delegates are already there, I've heard, filling up the hotels and mumming in the streets. And at the end of it all! King Goldmouth's Tithe. Back to tradition, he says. Time-tested values and solid, Fairylike customs. We'll be giving people donkey's heads next, I suppose. I don't think he'll go through with it, myself. Tithing is such a revolting, old-fashioned practice. Of course one goes through the motions for the sake of culture, pour out a tenth of a glass of wine every couple of years if you must or I suppose if you *have* ten children one of them might go into government, which is the same as losing a child really, but a real Tithe? Disgusting—and unsanitary if you ask me. I think in the end it'll all be a ruse, a trick done with mirrors. Somehow it'll all end in laughter and a chocolate for each of us, mark me."

"What *is* a Tithe? Not even the Scotch-nymph who lives in the north crannies of my whiskey lake knew, and she's the oldest thing I've met."

Mabry Muscat rubbed his long fingers, and Mallow felt certain he was a Jack-in-the-Green. His cravat glowed the crimson shade of the seat cushions, but his hair had gone as deep a blue as the sky outside. She could hardly see him. "I am older still, dear Mallow. And old as I am, I can just barely remember, when I was a child with my mother's milk on my chin and my father's holly upon my bed, the last Tithe Fairyland could stomach. It's a blood price, paid once every seven years, or ten, or a hundred, or seven hundred, depending on who you ask and how sick folk feel about it at the time. Every Tithe looks different—we'll see what this one will grow up to be, I suppose. I hope there will be fireworks, at least. Perhaps a

commemorative spoon. These are days of old barbary and new revivals." He fell quiet for a while. Finally, when she could see the night hills showing on his inky skin, Muscat said: "Have you a love you wish to sing? Tell me who you are, pretty Mallow, sweet Mallow, my practical rose in a sea of silly daisies."

Mallow looked him levelly in the eye, and hardly a soul in the world has yet to be half-smitten and half-frightened by a level look from that girl. She told him the truth. "I have never lost a love and I do not intend to. One can only lose love if one is careless, and I am never careless. You might say, really, that of anything I am best at caring, at paying close attention and minding what I've got. The King says I must go to the Foul—very well, I shall go. And I hope to find a Wet Magician or two while I am there, and learn, and buy several new books if I can."

"Ah! She does want something! Well—it's easy enough. Find the Nephelo tents, where the great cats of that city laze and lie. They practice the Wet Arts as well as any soul in Fairyland, and will let you have a saucer of milk besides. Perhaps I shall even go with you. I once lived in Nephelo after all, and one is always homesick for places where one came to grief."

Outside, the night road to Pandemonium ran smooth and swift through the northern counties of Fairyland. Valleys bloomed around them, full of gnarled egg trees and waving coalflowers, falling away into meadows full of brownie villages bustling and bright-heeled river-nymphs lassoing their blue currents around distant hills. The notion of a blood price, the very words Mabry Muscat has spoken, hung between them inside the Horse, too hot and terrible and heavy to be touched. They did not touch it, but after a day and a lunch and an apple for the Horse, Mallow consented to play Bezique—as long as they played for no bets. Later they tried Fool's Hand as well, but that's no fun at all without a wager. All the cards had Mabry's face on one side, and Mallow's on the other. She did not find this unsettling or charming, which clearly saddened Muscat deeply.

Occasionally, when they were very bored, they would open up Carolingus to a random page and listen to him holler: *Never marry a Fairy Queen! They're murder on the digestion and you'll never get a career girl to care about the tarts you spent all day slaving over a hot stove to make.* On a stop-in to a

village hostel, Mabry let Mallow open up the Carriageless Horse's neck and peer at the workings inside, which popped and hissed and burbled away, white and pink and green. *I recognize some of the thought that went into the beast,*Mallow said. *It's quite high-end Questing Physicks. See the vials of Purposeful Syrop, and the Hero's Alembic?* Mabry did see, and the Horse felt terribly pleased to be so regarded by such wise people.

Only once did Muscat ask if he might kiss her. Mallow declined, very reluctantly, more out of favor to that mysterious vanished love of his than because she did not wish to be kissed. He simply dealt the cards once more, and Mallow called the next trick.

Once or twice along the way, she heard ducks hooting, and held her books tight to her chest.

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